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PP RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC  
DE RUEHHK #2222/01 3451044  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 101044Z DEC 08  
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6425  
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 3894  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 1765  
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR PRIORITY 7562  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1376  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY 0829  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 3956  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/CM, CA/OCS/ACS/EAP, AIAG, OES/IHA, MED  
HHS FOR OGHA - STEIGER, HICKEY  
CDC ATLANTA FOR CCID AND COGH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMED](#) [EAGR](#) [KFLU](#) [PINR](#) [TBIO](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN HONG KONG, 80,000  
CHICKENS CULLED

11. (U) SUMMARY: Hong Kong's Health Secretary announced on December 9 the discovery of the H5 virus (Avian Influenza) in three dead chickens on a commercial farm within the territory near the border with China; test results for the H5N1 variant (transmissible to humans) are pending. Responding to the discovery, the HKG put in place a three kilometer quarantine ring around the farm and announced the culling of as many as 90,000 chickens from the two commercial farms and a market impacted by the discovery. The HKG has implemented its standard operating procedure for dealing with discovery of H5 infected poultry, imposing a 21-day ban on the importing of live chickens and raising the three-tier alert response level one notch from its lowest level. The Office of the Health Secretary has distributed information regarding the case to local consulates as part of Hong Kong's standard public response strategy. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: Hong Kong has well-established monitoring systems and practiced protocols and procedures in place to deal with the discovery. Health and hospital authorities are reacting aggressively to contain and identify the source of the outbreak. Hong Kong is nearing peak migratory bird arrivals and a large wetland preserve frequented by migratory waterfowl is located within the quarantine area. Despite aggressive preventative measures, including poultry vaccinations, discovery of the virus during the flu season is not unexpected and the response has been professional and appropriate. Front-page press reporting indicates the Hong Kong residents have confidence in the government response.

13. (U) Hong Kong Secretary for Food and Health Dr. York Chow announced on December 9 during in televised press conference confirmed the H5 or Avian Influenza (AI) virus was present in three dead chickens taken from a commercial farm in Yeun Long, New Territories, Hong Kong. Chow stated the testing was initiated after the owner reported a large number of dead and dying chickens at his commercial farm on December 8. Responding to the discovery, Health Authorities raised the three-tier AI alert level one step from its lowest level (Alert) to the second level (Serious) and put in place a three-kilometer quarantine ring around the infected farm. The quarantine area includes a second, smaller commercial chicken farm and portions of the Hong Kong Wetland Park, a major stopping point for migratory waterfowl.

14. (U) Following its standard operating procedure for such

outbreaks, the HKG also imposed a 21-day ban the importation of all live birds -- a disappointing move for many Hong Kong residents who traditionally purchase live poultry for holiday dinners during the winter solstice and Christmas season, according to press reports. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department is now culling an estimated 80,000 chickens at the impacted farms and an additional 10,000 birds from the farms which had already been shipped to markets. Farmers and traders are receiving HK\$30 (US\$4.25) in compensation for each bird killed. Although they are currently displaying no symptoms, six farm workers at the original infection site are being kept at Princess Margaret Hospital for observation.

15. (SBU) The H5N1 virus is regularly tested for and found in up to 25 wild birds in Hong Kong each year and was discovered in chicken dropping in three Hong Kong wet markets in June. The last confirmed outbreak of the AI virus in live chickens in Hong Kong occurred in January 2003 and resulted in the culling of over a million birds. Since that outbreak, the HKG has banned the public sale of live waterfowl and taken steady steps to drastically reduce the number of live chicken vendors and markets stalls; movement to a central slaughtering facility will be complete by 2011. Special licensing and registration permits are required to keep live chickens in the territory, which has a total live chicken population today of about 600,000. Other risk mitigation efforts include limiting purchase and importing of live chickens to only Mainland farms inspected and certified by the HKG and widespread use of flu vaccinations to ensure birds remain healthy. Front page press reporting indicates

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the Hong Kong public are taking the announcement and the HKG actions in stride and have confidence in the Health Department's response.  
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